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**Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations: cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union**

## Letter dated 10 August 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you, on behalf of the Namibian Presidency of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the text of the following four documents, adopted by the 3rd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, in Geneva on 21 July 2010:

Declaration adopted by the Conference (annex I);

Report on how parliaments organize their work with the United Nations (annex II);

Report on strengthening the Inter-Parliamentary Union and its relationship with the United Nations (annex III);

Report on building global standards for democratic parliaments (annex IV).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annexes as a document of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly under item 124 (m) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Kaire M. **Mbuende**
Permanent Representative

* A/65/150.

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## Annexes to the letter dated 10 August 2010 from the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

## Annex I

# 3rd WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT

United Nations, Geneva, 19-21 July 2010

21 July 2010

## DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE

***Securing global democratic accountability for the common good***

(1) Accountability and representation lie at the heart of democracy. Parliament is the central institution of any democracy through which the will of the people is expressed, laws are passed and government is held to account. We, the Speakers of the world's parliaments, have convened at the United Nations in Geneva to discuss how our parliaments can help secure democratic accountability worldwide for the common good.

(2) Since our last summit in 2005, the world has undergone complex and profound changes. We are living in an increasingly multi-polar world characterized by deepening economic globalization coupled with radical changes in international economic relations and the balance of power. We also see greater support for multilateralism and the promotion of democracy in international relations.

(3) Since 2005, economic growth and development have been stymied by a global financial and economic crisis. Although it might seem that the global economy today shows signs of recovery, the economic foundations remain weak with deep-rooted structural problems that have not yet been addressed. Several States have seen their public deficits worsen following interventions in the banking and financial sector. The global development gap is still widening. The economic crisis is compounded by challenges relating to climate change, food and energy security, trafficking in persons, migration and public health, the solutions to which still elude us. Devastating natural disasters have become more prevalent and non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons, drugs trafficking, piracy and other forms of organized crime have increased substantially.

(4) Terrorism, by undermining peace, democracy and stability, continues to be one of the most serious threats faced by all humankind. We have an important responsibility to facilitate our governments' efforts to combat terrorism by implementing all relevant UN resolutions and international conventions and agreements. We encourage States to show solidarity and take collective global action against terrorism by adopting, sooner rather than later, a comprehensive convention against all forms of terrorism.

(5) We are more than ever convinced that only by working together can we address these and other global challenges successfully and make a better world for all people. While we may differ on matters of policy and action, we are unanimous in our belief that all countries, large and small, rich and poor, need to work together,

seeking solutions, including through multilateral channels, with the United Nations, which guarantees the sovereign equality of States, at the centre. We reaffirm the commitment of our parliaments to engage fully in support of this effort.

## A. Parliaments and democracy

(6) Our parliaments are national institutions, marked by the history and cultural heritage of each of our countries. We are proud of our sovereign independence which it is our right, duty and wish to defend.

(7) We recognize that democratization is a continuing process for all parliaments and that it is necessary to promote sound democratic practices within our parliaments, whether they are recently established or have been in existence for centuries. We are committed to assisting each other in this effort, with the stronger institutions providing assistance to the weaker ones, with increased sharing of good practices for the greater benefit of all, and with a constant concern for the fuller participation of our citizens in national and global governance in the interests of the common good.

(8) As a collegiate body of the world's parliaments, we rely on the collective experience and wisdom of our members. Together we pledge to make our parliaments more representative, transparent, accessible, accountable and effective, enabling the diverse components of society to participate in politics. We will also promote standards of integrity for parliaments and their members, recognizing that membership of parliament is first and foremost a public service, and will uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity in public life.

(9) Democracy is founded on the rule of law and respect for human rights, which are based on the precept that nothing must infringe upon human dignity. We reaffirm the need to ensure the equal rights and opportunities of men and women, thus promoting a genuine partnership between them in all spheres. We pledge to help promote a climate of tolerance and to safeguard diversity, pluralism and the right to be different, which also implies protecting the rights of persons belonging to minority and indigenous groups.

(10) We emphatically state that the proportion of women in parliament today is not sufficient and we pledge to redouble our efforts to reach, as a global average, the internationally agreed target of thirty per cent of women in parliaments by 2015. We undertake to combat all forms of discrimination against women which prevent them from realizing their aspirations to greater involvement in public life.

(11) We emphasize the importance of encouraging our youth to invest their energy, enthusiasm and creativity in the advancement of our societies and the promotion of mutual understanding. We urge our parliaments to address the concerns and aspirations of youth and encourage the participation of young people in public life.

(12) We are preoccupied by a widely held perception of politics as a closed space where there is little room for opposing opinions and consideration of alternative policies. We will do all we can to ensure that the rights of all members of parliament are guaranteed; they must be free to speak out without fear of harassment or punishment, even when they do not toe the party line. Equally, we are committed to fostering political tolerance among citizens and political leaders through education and communication.

(13) Defending our parliaments also means that we will be outspoken in our condemnation when parliaments are dissolved in breach of the national constitution or when members of parliament are arbitrarily deprived of their mandate or otherwise have their human rights violated. We have seen a number of instances of this in recent times. We condemn the usurpation of political power by force and the persecution of elected representatives of the people.

### B. Parliaments on the international stage

(14) We believe that, in all likelihood, the world will continue to be confronted by crises that will pose tremendous challenges to the prevailing order. Such crises, however, if they are managed democratically, can provide a springboard for vital and regenerative change.

(15) We are concerned that this is not generally the case at present. The democracy gap persists. Many would say it is widening. Those who have never had a voice in domestic or global affairs remain marginalized or excluded altogether.

(16) While the recent convulsions that began with a financial crisis are diminishing, millions continue to suffer from the aftershocks. For untold numbers of people, especially in the developing countries, the challenges of daily survival have worsened. The suffering will endure and, if nothing is done, go largely ignored or unnoticed. We remain convinced that one vital way to bridge the growing gap between those who have the means to live comfortable lives and those who are wholly dispossessed is to make multilateral institutions more democratic and representative, and establish more participatory practices at the international level.

(17) The time has come for an imaginative leap of faith. Today's multilateral systems should allow for much greater consideration for the thoughts, feelings and aspirations of people everywhere whose voices go unheard.

(18) We therefore call once again for greater parliamentary involvement in international cooperation and we reiterate the recommendations we have made at our past two conferences. We emphasize that our parliaments must be more active in international affairs by contributing to and monitoring international negotiations, by overseeing the enforcement of agreements that have been reached by governments and, more generally, by ensuring national compliance with international norms and the rule of law.

(19) Building political will and public support and ensuring national ownership and effective implementation of international agreements can only come about if parliaments and their members are well informed and actively engaged, both nationally and internationally, throughout the consultation and negotiating process. We are committed to strengthening our capacity to assume this role, without prejudice to the separation of powers, and we call on our governments to work with us to this effect. Wherever possible, we intend to ensure that parliamentarians are included in national delegations to major United Nations meetings and multilateral negotiating fora.

(20) Our involvement in international cooperation must be firmly rooted in the daily work of our parliaments, much of which relates to ensuring accountability. It is therefore essential that our parliaments play an important role in overseeing the implementation of governmental programs to address major challenges, such as poverty, access to water, climate change, food and energy security.



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(21) We acknowledge the growing significance of regional and sub-regional parliaments and their contribution to international cooperation. We reiterate our earlier calls on the IPU to cooperate more closely with these institutions with a view to enhancing coherence and efficiency in global and interregional parliamentary cooperation.

## C. The United Nations

(22) The United Nations is the most universal, representative and authoritative international organization of sovereign States and it plays an irreplaceable role in international affairs. We pledge our support to the Organization and will continue to extend our cooperation in keeping with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

(23) We take note of the reforms undertaken so far by the United Nations. It has established new bodies that are beginning to prove their worth, and is working to bring more logical coherence to its operations at the country level. There is, however, need for further reform to enhance its legitimacy and effectiveness by making it more democratic and representative. We encourage the United Nations to continue this exercise, particularly by revitalizing the UN General Assembly and reforming the Security Council to take account of today's realities. We also believe that Member States have to invest more in development, global peace and security, and human rights, and in integrating gender equality into all UN programs and activities.

(24) We support the tireless efforts by the United Nations in pursuit of world peace and security. We applaud the renewed focus on preventive diplomacy and peace-building, and remain firmly convinced that democratic, strong and effective parliaments are vital to sustainable peace. We commend the United Nations Secretary-General for his five-point nuclear disarmament proposal, and pledge to pursue efforts towards a nuclear-weapon-free world.

(25) We commend the United Nations for enshrining the world's development objectives in the Millennium Development Goals. We endorse these goals and the 21 targets into which they are translated. Much has been done to meet these targets, but if current trends persist, an alarming number of them may not be met. Governments, and in particular those from the industrialized countries, must honour the pledges they have made to fund these efforts notwithstanding the difficulties engendered by the financial and economic crisis.

(26) In this, as in so many other areas, we all stand to gain from building a closer and more powerful relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. The Millennium Development Goals will not be met without a strong sense of accountability accompanying all efforts. Democracy, security, development, human rights and gender equality are inextricably linked. Our parliaments can do more to ensure that development goals are taken into account in our daily work and translated into national programs and laws. Likewise, we encourage our parliaments, when they examine draft budgets and bills, to assess their impact on the fulfillment of the Goals. We pledge to support these efforts, monitor progress closely and do our part in meeting the targets by 2015.

(27) We recognize that much has already been achieved by the United Nations. Looking back to our first summit in 2000, we see ten years of encouraging progress. Our parliaments have gained from an awakening within the United Nations to our crucial role in providing the legislative foundations for development and in strengthening the rule of law which is essential to development. Recent summit

outcomes have acknowledged this, particularly in the area of development aid. The United Nations has also started to realize the need to support fragile parliaments as it sets out to rebuild states emerging from conflicts. The United Nations has also shown a new interest in keeping parliaments duly informed of their agenda and activities.

(28) Yet much more needs to be done and we look to the Inter-Parliamentary Union to help forge a closer and more effective working relationship between the United Nations and our parliaments.

## D. The Inter-Parliamentary Union

(29) We take pride in the IPU and its many accomplishments stretching over three centuries. Our predecessors who founded the Organization over one hundred and twenty years ago and their successors have helped lay a solid foundation for international political cooperation and multilateralism.

(30) Today, the IPU is the world organization of parliaments. It facilitates political debate, dialogue and cooperation within and between parliaments. It promotes and defends democracy. It develops standards, disseminates good practices and provides concrete support in constructing democratic parliaments. It builds capacity in our parliaments in support of peace, security and development. It defends the human rights of members of parliament and promotes respect for universal human rights norms and principles. It works in support of gender equality and women's participation in political and public life. It assists our parliaments in coping with a growing international agenda and in developing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations.

(31) We invite the IPU to strengthen and rationalize its programs in support of our parliaments and to facilitate cooperation projects among parliaments. We view the Organization as a center of excellence in relation to parliaments and democracy and we wish to see the IPU developing this work further. The IPU can also do more to assist our parliaments in addressing the Millennium Development Goals and in coping with some of today's foremost global challenges.

(32) We affirm that the IPU is the international body best suited to help build the relationship between parliaments and the United Nations. As an Observer to the United Nations since 2002, the IPU has played this role to increasing effect. We encourage the IPU and the United Nations to expand their cooperation and set it on a firmer footing.

(33) In keeping with the recommendations of the first two Speakers' Conferences to bridge the democracy deficit in international relations, we also encourage the IPU to promote greater accountability and transparency of the Bretton Woods institutions. The IPU can do this by facilitating more direct interaction between parliaments and the Bretton Woods Institutions, and by helping to strengthen the capacities of parliaments to exercise their role in the budget process and economic decision-making in general.

(34) We welcome the discussion which has been started within the IPU in order to strengthen its functions, promote its efficiency and develop its cooperation with the United Nations and its institutions.

(35) We conclude our deliberations with a sense of cautious optimism. The world is facing multiple crises on an unprecedented scale. As never before, however, there is a shared understanding that we can only address these challenges by working together and we, who have a popular mandate to represent the people, will not be found wanting. We, in our parliaments,

can and will do our part in securing global democratic accountability for the common good of humankind.

Annex II

**3rd WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT**

United Nations, Geneva, 19-21 July 2010

Item 2

SP-CONF/2010/2-R.1
1 July 2010

# REPORT ON HOW PARLIAMENTS ORGANIZE THEIR WORK WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

*Rapporteur: Mr. D. Astori, President of the Senate of Uruguay*

In 2007, in order to better respond to the growing cooperation between the IPU, its Member Parliaments and the United Nations, the IPU's governing bodies established a Committee on United Nations Affairs. The Committee meets in plenary once a year and is tasked with examining how parliaments and the IPU organize their work vis-à-vis the United Nations, convening hearings with senior UN officials, looking at the overall working of the United Nations and its reform, and evaluating progress in IPU-UN cooperation and proposing strategies for further action.

As part of its evaluation exercise, the Committee decided to draw on the experiences of national parliaments in dealing with the United Nations: their needs and expectations, good practices that they have developed, and challenges and opportunities for improvement. Under the Committee's guidance, a survey was developed and submitted to parliaments for their response.

Ninety-six parliaments took part in the survey, which examined how parliaments relate to the United Nations and its General Assembly, how they interact with special UN meetings and major negotiating processes that lead to conventions and international agreements, how they work with UN country offices, and what the IPU can do to promote greater interaction between parliament and the United Nations. The main findings of the survey are presented below.

## How do parliaments relate to the United Nations and its General Assembly?

By and large, issues relating to the United Nations are dealt with in the plenary or in the committee on foreign relations/international affairs. In a few countries, UN matters are addressed in other parliamentary (standing or select) committees, depending on the subject matter. Such is the case for the committees dealing with human rights in Cyprus, human resources and social and community development in Namibia, capacity-building in Bahrain and health in Kenya. A small number of parliaments, such as those of Bangladesh, Germany and Sudan, have dedicated UN committees or sub-committees .

In many countries, there is little or no direct interaction between parliaments and their country's Ambassador/Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Information and answers to questions from MPs generally seem to be relayed through the ministry of foreign affairs. Instructions or national mandates given to the Ambassador to the United Nations are only occasionally addressed in parliament through debate or questions. The vast majority of parliaments indicate that instructions on UN matters rarely require their approval.

Over 70 per cent of respondents report that MPs are included in national delegations to the UN General Assembly, with 46 per cent doing so always or often. Australia, Bangladesh, Denmark, France, Gabon, Georgia, India, Norway, Pakistan, Senegal and the United Kingdom are among the countries that always include MPs in national delegations to the UN General Assembly. In most countries, this practice tends to be more sporadic and of an ad hoc nature. About one third of the respondents indicate that MPs are never included in UNGA delegations.

While in most cases MPs do not stay for more than a week, for example during the opening of the General Assembly, MPs from Australia, Hungary, Kenya, Morocco and the Netherlands remain throughout the autumn session of the General Assembly.

The role of MPs in UNGA delegations varies. Generally, they come to attend, listen, observe and familiarize themselves with UN activities and processes. In only a few cases - Austria, Bangladesh, Italy, Islamic Republic of Iran, Namibia and Sweden - do MPs assume a more active role by participating in UN Committee work, delivering statements, debating and bringing a parliamentary perspective to the proceedings of the United Nations.

In most countries, the Government provides information to parliament on the nation's financial contribution to the United Nations (general budget, peacekeeping, etc), its agencies and programmes. This, however, is usually done indirectly, as contributions to the United Nations are listed under the budget executed by the ministry of foreign affairs, which goes to parliament every year for approval and adoption. When such budget information is not provided through regular channels, it can be made available upon request or through official questioning in Parliament.

How do parliaments interact with special meetings and major negotiating processes at the United Nations?

There is little evidence of systematic parliamentary involvement in the preparation and follow-up to special meetings of the United Nations. Only about one quarter of the respondent parliaments indicate that MPs are frequently or regularly included in national delegations to such special meetings. Even fewer - 12 per cent - systematically organize debates and hearings to prepare for and follow up on the outcome of such UN meetings. Twenty-six per cent never do so and about 60 per cent do so only occasionally.

Most parliaments do not regularly monitor major international negotiating processes taking place at the United Nations. They do not regularly hold hearings with the minister who takes part in the negotiations, or provide instructions or mandates. Parliamentary involvement in negotiations leading up to the conclusion of legally binding commitments

by States normally only takes place towards the end of the process. At that point, parliaments are informed of the outcome of the negotiations. More often than not ministers simply report to parliament. At some stage, parliament is invited to ratify the agreement.

Only in a handful of countries is Parliament part and parcel of the process of reporting on the implementation of international agreements. The Parliaments of Austria, Gabon, Georgia, Ireland, Namibia and Tunisia have put in place procedures whereby country reports on the implementation of UN conventions are submitted to parliament. Parliament organizes debates and hearings on these reports. Members of parliament from these countries are part of the delegation attending the periodic review by the UN monitoring committee (where the country report is discussed). The recommendations subsequently issued by the UN monitoring committee are conveyed, discussed and followed up in parliament. In most of these cases, a specific parliamentary committee is tasked with advising and monitoring progress in the implementation of these agreements.

Even when legislators are not directly involved in such a process, they are still in a position to secure information through reports of foreign affairs ministries and parliamentary committees, parliamentary libraries, IPU and UN meetings, and the media. In several countries, it is standard practice for parliament to organize debates on key international issues or events, or to convene regular question and answer sessions with government officials.

How do parliaments work with UN country offices?

Very few parliaments (about 12 per cent) have regular and systematic interaction with UN country offices. When it does take place it is generally ad-hoc, or takes place on the occasion of special anniversaries (International Days, the launching of UN and country reports and publications, etc). In many instances, it is the United Nations that initiates cooperation or joint activities in parliaments, though developing country parliaments do request seminars and training. Many parliaments report on activities – including technical assistance - initiated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other UN bodies such as the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Developing country parliaments receive support from the United Nations in the form of capacity-building, technical assistance and development programmes. Ethiopia, for example, receives assistance from the United Nations to train parliamentary staff, improve its facilities, and obtain computers, books, and transportation and resource persons. Namibia receives UN funding which facilitates field missions by MPs to perform parliamentary oversight functions, while in Pakistan, UNDP runs a parliamentary development programme.

Many parliaments receive training and technical assistance from the United Nations in areas such as legislative drafting, procurement, human resources and the improvement of facilities. This support is driven by supply rather than demand. There is generally a lack

of strategic planning and engagement by parliaments in setting priorities and developing assistance projects.

The issue of how parliaments work with UN country offices is also analyzed in the context of the programme of work of the IPU Committee on UN Affairs and of the Committee's Advisory Group. The Advisory Group undertook field missions to Tanzania (September 2008) and Viet Nam (February 2009), to examine the process of One UN reform, which is aimed at building greater coherence in the delivery of international development assistance.

In both cases, the findings of the field missions underscore the fact that parliamentary involvement in overall development assistance to the country remains deficient, and that significant efforts are required to redress this situation. In order for parliament to enhance its role in the elaboration and implementation of national development strategies, the parliamentary leadership in the two pilot countries have committed themselves to review their own mechanisms for engaging with the United Nations through a more dynamic use of existing mechanisms and the application of new ones, a better flow of information, and the establishment of more functional linkages with the United Nations at the level of select parliamentary committees and the Office of the Speaker.

Good practices

The survey invited parliaments to provide examples of how they organize their work vis-à-vis the United Nations. The following examples were provided:

- Canada reports that UN documentation is made available through its parliamentary library and publications.

- In Algeria and Kenya, MPs play an active part by raising questions in parliament on UN matters.

- In Brazil, Botswana, Hungary and Tunisia, parliament is systematically involved in discussions and reviews to determine the country's position on UN matters, including through regular cooperation with UN country offices.

- The Parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, South Africa and Spain organize debates and hearings on upcoming or ongoing international negotiations, major UN events or pressing global issues.

- Members of parliament from Austria, Denmark, Gabon, Georgia, Namibia, Tunisia and the United Kingdom are included in national delegations to the UN General Assembly and UN special meetings and are encouraged to participate fully as members of the delegation.

- The Parliaments of China, Italy and Tanzania invite local UN offices to attend visitor galleries during sessions or to attend meetings as envoys.

- The Parliaments in Bangladesh, Germany and Sudan have set up a dedicated parliamentary committee or other body on UN affairs to keep themselves updated and involved in UN matters, procedures and processes.

What can the IPU do to promote stronger interaction between parliaments and the UN?

The survey reveals several challenges and barriers to parliaments wishing to develop closer interaction with the United Nations.

One is the fact that many parliaments are still in an early stage of institutional development. They do not have the knowledge or resources they need to be able to deal with the enormous diversity of issues on the UN agenda and the huge volume of documentation and information that needs to be absorbed. Language is also an important barrier since much of the material may not be available in national languages.

Time is a significant constraint. MPs are constantly dividing their time between different interests and commitments and have limited opportunities to address matters that go beyond domestic and constituency issues.

In some countries, international affairs are traditionally the exclusive purview of the executive. In other countries, parliament holds little power over the executive branch and is thus hampered in its ability to engage the United Nations.

Members of parliament are also unfamiliar with the complex bureaucracy of the United Nations. They view the lack of a formal position for parliaments within the UN system as a serious barrier to MPs' involvement.

Many of the respondents indicate an interest in building their capacity to become more involved in UN processes. They suggest that the IPU should seek to facilitate a more systematic exchange of information between parliaments and the United Nations system. It should organize more seminars and training sessions for both MPs and staff on UN reform, global issues and international commitments. It should also develop specific information tools such as handbooks and guidance notes for parliamentarians.

The IPU should continue to sensitize MPs to the importance of their participation in UN-related activities and processes. In order to help bridge the implementation gap of international commitments, there is a need to ensure that legislators are well-informed and actively engaged. Many respondents stress that the IPU should take the lead in initiating parliamentary debate on burning issues such as the global economic, financial and food crises.

There is also great value in the IPU engaging with select parliamentary committees and individual MPs on specific issues pertaining to the global agenda. This helps to better mainstream the global agenda into the work of national parliaments. It also serves to add a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations, and hence help bridge the democracy gap in international relations.

The IPU and the United Nations should pursue their cooperation in strengthening the capacity of parliaments in the development, oversight and implementation of national policies. Many parliaments still require assistance in developing mechanisms to better monitor the implementation of international commitments.

Several respondents suggest that the IPU should focus more on development cooperation and aid effectiveness, including through the organization of more needs assessment and fact-finding missions. Parliaments need to be included in the decision-making structures set up between the United Nations, donors and the executive at the country level; greater access to information on aid flows and modalities is required; and parliament's capacity to analyse annual budgets and other related legislation must be enhanced. From this perspective, the importance of transparency and accountability in the management of international aid is underscored, not least by making sure that incoming funds are reflected in the national budget and hence open to parliamentary scrutiny.

The IPU is invited to help parliaments engage more substantively with the United Nations at the country level. The IPU should also encourage a more coherent and systematic approach to how the United Nations itself relates to national parliaments as key institutions of democratic governance. Strengthening the institution of parliament and providing relevant capacity building and technical assistance should be recognized as a priority for the international community as a whole.

At the international level, the IPU is encouraged to ensure the implementation of relevant UN General Assembly resolutions, particularly those relating to UN-IPU cooperation and those calling for more systematic involvement of legislators in national delegations to major UN events. The IPU Committee on UN Affairs and its Advisory Group need to be bolstered and better utilized. In general, respondents feel that there is scope for the UN-IPU relationship to be further consolidated and formally institutionalized. Lastly, the IPU has a particular role to play in helping enhance cooperation between the United Nations and regional parliamentary organizations.

Concluding remarks

The IPU and its Committee on United Nations Affairs are grateful to all the parliaments that have responded to this Survey. The input received has been very useful in gaining a better understanding of the realities on the ground, and the needs and expectations of parliaments as they seek to play a more active role in addressing global issues and in engaging with the United Nations system. The conclusions and recommendations formulated by the respondents to the survey will provide the Committee on United Nations Affairs with an important basis for its future work, including strategies for future action.

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**List of countries that responded to the survey** (as at June 2010): Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Congo , Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Rep. of), Italy,

Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Rwanda, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Viet Nam and Zambia.

**Annex III**

**3rd WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT**

United Nations, Geneva, 19-21 July 2010

Item3

SP-CONF/2010/3(c)-R.1
1 July 2010

# PRESENTATION OF REPORTS ON PROGRESS SINCE THE 2005 SPEAKERS' CONFERENCE

## (c) STRENGTHENING THE IPU AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

*Rapporteur: Mr. Geert Versnick, Vice-President of the IPU*

### Introduction

Since they began in 2000, the world Conferences of Speakers of Parliament have provided Speakers with opportunities to discuss major challenges facing humanity, the need for a stronger United Nations to cope with them, and the role they see for parliaments and the IPU in furthering international cooperation.

The first Conference led to a commitment by Heads of State and Government, expressed in the Millennium Declaration, to strengthen further the cooperation between the United Nations and parliaments through their world organization, the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This was to be done in various fields, including peace and security, economic and social development, international law and human rights, and democracy and gender issues.

The present report provides an overview of progress achieved in implementing this commitment by strengthening the IPU and its relationship with the United Nations. The first part of the report recalls the recommendations formulated by the two Speakers Conferences in 2000 and 2005. The second part describes the steps that have been taken to implement them. The reports end by looking ahead with a few conclusions.

### Two World Conferences of Speakers of Parliament

The 2000 Conference of Presiding Officers was the first event ever at which Speakers of Parliament from throughout the world had met in the same room to discuss their role in the international sphere. As the world celebrated the millennium, the Speakers assembled at the United Nations in New York to pledge their interest in and their commitment to international cooperation.

At a time when multilateralism was seen to be under threat, the focus of the first Conference was thus to offer political support to the United Nations as the principal instrument of

international cooperation. In asserting the need for a strong relationship between parliaments and the United Nations, the Speakers declared that their ambition was to bring a more manifestly democratic dimension to international decision-making and cooperation.

The Declaration which the Speakers adopted at the end of the debate reflected this ambition. It contained a description of the main challenges facing humanity at the dawn of the new millennium, as viewed by parliaments. It reaffirmed the central role of the United Nations in meeting those challenges, committed parliamentary support for UN reform, outlined the momentous evolution in international relations, set forth the imperative for parliaments and the IPU to provide a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation and described how they proposed to accomplish this objective.

Five years later the Speakers of Parliament met in New York for their second World Conference. As the Heads of State and Government assembled in New York, much of the Speakers' debate at UN Headquarters centred on a set of proposals for reform of the United Nations which had been tabled by the Secretary-General. Delegates also had a first opportunity to take stock of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which had been adopted five years earlier.

The Speakers of Parliament reviewed progress in implementing the declaration they adopted in 2000 and discussed growing challenges facing the world. In their concluding declaration, they issued a strong call for multilateral action to solve global problems and pledged to provide support. They asked that the United Nations be given the structures and resources needed to address economic and social development problems and called on States to live up to their commitments to provide development assistance. They asked for greater efforts to address global security issues, fight terrorism, defend human rights and promote democracy and good governance.

More than anything, however, the Speakers drew attention to what they saw as a democracy gap in international relations and issued a call for greater democracy at the United Nations. While expressing appreciation for the progress that had been made in creating greater and more meaningful cooperation between parliaments, the IPU and the United Nations, they emphasized that they wished to see more strategic and mutually beneficial interaction between the United Nations and the parliamentary world. The Speakers also resolved to work ever more closely with the IPU, the unique global parliamentary counterpart of the United Nations.

The IPU and its relationship with the UN ten years on

The IPU has seen major changes over the last decade. After the Millennium Summit, the IPU undertook a comprehensive review of its strengths and weaknesses, assessing its objectives, structures and working methods. It adopted a large scale reform programme which was accompanied by a comprehensive revision of its Statutes and Rules.

The modernized IPU is more clearly an organization of parliaments that strives to assist parliament in its work and is accountable to parliaments. Its structures and working methods are those of parliaments. Like parliaments, the IPU holds debates in plenary Assemblies and carries out much of its work in standing or select committees. Its programs are geared to assisting parliaments in a wide range of fields with special emphasis on issues relating to democracy.

As requested in the Millennium Declaration, the IPU facilitates parliaments' interaction with the United Nations on matters broadly falling within the spheres of peace, development and democracy. It mobilizes parliamentary expertise on issues that are high on the agenda of the United Nations, providing a parliamentary perspective informed directly by the views of the electorate. Throughout the year, the IPU offers members of parliament opportunities to debate these topics and to formulate recommendations for action by parliaments, by governments and by the United Nations.

The IPU has set up a Committee on United Nations Affairs which considers how the organization can help strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and parliaments. In 2007, the Committee put forward a policy paper on the nature of the relationship between the United Nations and the world of parliaments, which was endorsed by the IPU's governing bodies and submitted to the United Nations (Annex).

The paper makes the fundamental point that in tomorrow's world parliament must be part of international efforts to address global problems and challenges, and that the IPU is a critical component of this equation. Each parliament is sovereign in its approach to international cooperation and the IPU is not a substitute for action by parliaments. It is not, nor should it become, a global parliament. It is nonetheless useful to parliaments. It promotes action by parliaments, acting as a catalyst, facilitating interaction with the world of the United Nations and, more generally, helps to ensure that the views of the parliamentary community are heard at the United Nations.

To be able to do these things, the IPU has had to solidify its own relationship with the United Nations. A first step was taken in 2002, when the IPU obtained permanent observer status with the UN General Assembly, endowing IPU representatives with the right to take the floor at the meetings of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. The status also made it possible to have official IPU documents distributed in the General Assembly. UN specialized agencies were invited to adopt similar modalities for cooperation with the IPU. For the first time, the General Assembly welcomed the efforts made by the IPU to provide for a greater parliamentary contribution to the UN.

The IPU also did more to encourage legislators to join national delegations and attend parliamentary sessions convened by IPU at major UN conferences: the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002), the World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva 2003 – Tunis 2005), the Global Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey 2002 – Doha 2008), the Global Forum on Human Trafficking (Vienna – 2008), the UNCTAD Ministerial Meetings (Sao Paulo 2004 – Accra 2008) are some examples.

Substantive cooperation with UN specialized agencies developed at a fast pace, particularly in the cases of UNDP, UNICEF, ILO, UNCTAD, UNAIDS and UNESCO. Activities included seminars and workshops, consultations on good practices and model legislation, joint publications, and technical assistance to parliaments, particularly in countries trying to rebuild their institutions in the aftermath of war.

The IPU has worked with various UN bodies and agencies to produce guides and handbooks for parliamentarians. To date, some 16 handbooks have been issued and

distributed to parliaments. The publications cover a wide range of areas: humanitarian law, refugee protection, rights of the child, oversight of the security sector, small arms, violence against women, gender budgeting, persons with disabilities, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, and so forth. Many have already been translated into the languages of UN member States.

In the UN Treaty Bodies and their review mechanisms the IPU has helped parliaments to increase their leverage in the national review of international commitments. Perhaps the most successful to date is in the case of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The IPU works with the parliaments of the countries under review so that they can take part in the review process, provide input to the national report, attend the session of the CEDAW Committee and receive the UN findings for consideration and action by parliament. Efforts are currently under way to develop a similar mechanism for the UN Human Rights Council and its Universal Periodic Review mechanism.

With its new status at the United Nations, the IPU has also been able to influence UN processes and decisions, particularly in the new UN bodies established after the UN Summit of 2005: the Peacebuilding Commission, the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) of ECOSOC and the UN Human Rights Council. A General Assembly Resolution of November 2008 acknowledges the contribution by the IPU in shaping the agenda and work of the Development Cooperation Forum, while encouraging the UN Peacebuilding Commission to work closely with the IPU.

The annual Parliamentary Hearing at the United Nations is now formally a joint UN-IPU event convened by the IPU President and the President of the UN General Assembly. Its summary report is an official document of both the IPU and the General Assembly. The Hearing brings parliamentarians' views directly to the United Nations and provides a basis for improving parliamentary oversight of UN operations. In the course of the year, there are other specialized parliamentary meetings at the UN in New York, such as the one held at the annual session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Parliamentary scrutiny of UN operations also takes on other forms. As mentioned above, the IPU recently set up a Committee on United Nations Affairs, which meets annually at the IPU October Assembly. The Committee reviews UN-IPU cooperation, monitors progress towards institutional reform of the UN system, and identifies new areas of action. Its Advisory Group is mandated, inter alia, to conduct field missions to UN pilot countries implementing the One-UN reform. To date, missions have visited two of the eight pilot countries, Tanzania and Viet Nam. In both cases, the missions have led to better involvement of the respective parliaments in national development strategies and the monitoring of international aid. More and more, local UN offices are working with the parliament.

At the United Nations, initial reservations towards involving parliamentarians in UN work are gradually being overcome. For example, General Assembly thematic debates often feature MPs as key-note speakers. The UN acknowledges the practice of including MPs as members of national delegations to major UN meetings and events, and member States have been invited to adopt it more systematically. Permanent Missions are paying greater attention to parliamentary meetings held at the United Nations.

In essence, a broad agenda of work has developed between the two organizations. This is attested to by the biennial Report of the UN Secretary-General on Cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU. Despite this, more systematic consultations are needed. It has thus been decided that a regular annual exchange will take place between the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the senior leadership of the IPU.

Moreover, the UN General Assembly has decided that the agenda of its 2010 session will include an item entitled *Cooperation between the United Nations, national parliaments and the IPU*. This will offer Member States a new opportunity to discuss this triangular relationship with a view to further strengthening interaction between the United Nations and the world of parliaments.

Looking ahead

Considerable progress has been made since 2000 to modernize and strengthen the IPU and to build up the organization as a parliamentary counterpart to the United Nations at the global level. It is increasingly able to raise awareness in parliaments on matters being addressed at and by the United Nations and assist them in providing a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations.

These efforts need to be vigorously pursued in the coming years.

A parliamentary dimension is provided by parliaments themselves. How they do it will always depend on the parliamentary system prevailing in any given country and the powers conferred upon the parliamentary chambers under the constitution or basic law. Every parliament is sovereign in its approach. Common to all, however, is an effort to apprehend the business of the United Nations and make it more integral to their legislative and oversight work.

The IPU is a critical component of this equation. The Millennium Declaration calls for closer co-operation between the United Nations and parliaments, through their world organization, the IPU. The IPU acts as a catalyst. It is a facilitator; not a substitute. It belongs to parliaments, understands them and defends their interests. It is an inter-parliamentary organization and its relationship with the United Nations matters.

There has to be greater understanding by the United Nations and its Member States for the role of the IPU in helping provide a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations. The IPU is not seeking to do the work of the UN; it is equally important that the UN should not do the work of the IPU. The cooperation between the United Nations and parliaments should respect the balance and separation of powers between government and parliament. The relationship which the United Nations develops with the IPU must reflect this principle.

It is on this basis that the IPU and the United Nations need to build a strategic partnership. This, in turn, presupposes that the IPU itself should be more clearly recognized as a fully-fledged international organization. The IPU must be able to count upon greater political and diplomatic support and strengthen its ability to promote democracy. It needs to

stand on a more equal footing with other major international organizations so as to facilitate its cooperation with these organizations. It must be able to operate with the necessary guarantees in all countries.

There is today growing international recognition of the importance of having democratic parliaments in all countries that can assume fully their constitutional role at the national level and provide a parliamentary dimension to international cooperation. To achieve progress the IPU needs to be clear and focussed about its future direction and has to be able to count upon support from States. It is against this background that the IPU is now engaged in developing a comprehensive strategy for its further development in the next five years.

## Appendix

### ON THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE WORLD OF PARLIAMENTS

***Policy paper[1] presented by Mr. Geert Versnick, MP (Belgium), member of the Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs***

***Endorsed by the 117th IPU Assembly (Geneva, 10 October 2007)***

Introduction

1. We live in an interdependent world where yesterday's neat distinctions between national and international affairs, and what constitutes domestic and foreign policy, no longer apply. Events in one country frequently have profound effects on other States and on international relations generally, which, in turn, help shape the domestic agenda in countries all over the world in a never-ending circle.

2. As this world evolves, so does the universe of international organizations. A hundred years ago there were few entities specifically set up to manage international or multilateral cooperation. Today, they number many thousands, operate at the global, regional and sub-regional levels, and cover most aspects of human endeavour. Foremost among the global organizations is the United Nations and its system of specialized agencies.

3. The United Nations is a permanent forum for inter-governmental cooperation. At the United Nations, governments negotiate and agree on international conventions and guidelines and on major operations, for example to build peace and security in situations of conflict. However, the United Nations is also a service provider, much like a governmental agency or department. It implements programmes, particularly in support of development, in almost every country in the world, invariably in cooperation with governments, civil society organizations and others.

4. The United Nations is a classic international organization. Its members are States, which are represented by the executive branch of government and which negotiate and take decisions on its behalf. Under the United Nations Charter, there is no place for parliaments in the United Nations architecture. "We the peoples of the United Nations" are represented by governments, not the people's elected representatives.

5. However, the United Nations is not immutable and change is taking place. Structures and working methods, policies and programmes are under scrutiny, and much is being done

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[1] The present paper has been drawn up at the request of the Advisory Group of the IPU Committee on United Nations Affairs and reflects the substance of the discussion that took place at the Group's first meeting on 12 and 13 July 2007. It also draws heavily on a number of documents, reports and papers produced by parliaments and the IPU over many years, including the reports and outcome documents of the first two World Conferences of Speakers of Parliament organized by the IPU at United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2000 and 2005 (IPU Reports and Documents No. 39 and UN document A/60/398).

to turn the United Nations into a more effective organization that is better able to meet current demands.

6. Against this backdrop, what responsibilities do parliaments have in the area of international cooperation? How do they relate to multilateral organizations like the United Nations? What role do parliaments assume at the United Nations? What mechanisms are at their disposal? These are some of the questions that this paper will address.

Parliaments and international cooperation

7. While constitutional systems vary from one country to another, parliaments everywhere are the central institution of democracy. They embody the will of the people and its expectations that democracy will be responsive to its needs and solve the most pressing problems that confront it.

8. As the elected body that represents society in all its diversity, parliament has a unique responsibility for reconciling the conflicting interests and expectations of different groups and communities through the democratic machinery of dialogue and compromise. As the key legislative organ, parliament has the task of adapting laws to society's ever changing needs. As the body entrusted with the oversight of government, parliament is responsible for ensuring that governments are fully accountable to the people.

9. With few exceptions, parliaments have had scant involvement in international affairs. This was hardly surprising in the days when international affairs were largely handled through bilateral relations between States. Today's world presents a different picture, and parliaments everywhere are grappling with international affairs and, by extension, with the United Nations in a number of ways.[2]

10. There can be no gainsaying that parliaments have much to contribute to the United Nations. Members of parliament possess unique understanding of people in all their diversity and are better placed than most to articulate people's aspirations and explain what really matters to them. They are also powerful opinion makers and can, through their work in parliament, political parties and movements, and in their constituencies, raise public awareness and create popular support for international action at the United Nations. It therefore makes a great deal of sense to invite them to contribute to the work of the United Nations.

11. Of course, parliament's role is not limited to implementing previously negotiated international agreements. Without seeking to supplant the executive branch of government by negotiating international agreements at the United Nations, parliaments are increasingly insisting that these negotiations be subjected to much more stringent democratic parliamentary control. In practice, this means that a parliament should:

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[2] See also *Parliament and Democracy in the Twenty-First Century: A Guide to Good Practice* (IPU, 2006), which provides an extensive overview of parliament's involvement in international affairs.

- ✓ Be given sufficient advance notice of negotiations that will take place at the United Nations;
- ✓ Have accurate information at its disposal about the issues at stake and the policies and negotiating positions that will be under consideration;
- ✓ Be able to put questions to ministers and negotiators, and to express its political views to the government;
- ✓ Where the system so allows, provide the government with an explicit negotiating mandate or have the power to influence it;
- ✓ Be equipped with the necessary structures, procedures and resources to be able to monitor negotiations as they develop and, to that end,
- ✓ Be represented, as a matter of course, in national delegations attending these negotiations.

12. This is particularly true in that agreements reached at the United Nations will have little practical effect if parliaments do not take action to implement their provisions. To this end, parliaments are increasingly undertaking some or all of the following actions:

- ✓ Ensure that they are fully conversant with the content of an international agreement so as to be able to ratify or otherwise assent to the respective country's accession to it;
- ✓ Review and adapt existing laws, or adopt new ones, to implement the provisions of the agreement;
- ✓ Vote the financial resources to fund implementing programmes, generally under the annual budget, and monitor expenditures and implementation through the annual audited accounts;
- ✓ Require the government to report to parliament periodically on the implementation of a specific international agreement;
- ✓ Where international mechanisms have been set up to monitor the implementation of these agreements, debate and provide input for the periodic reports to these mechanisms, attend, as part of the government delegation, the sessions where the reports are discussed and review the ensuing recommendations for follow-up.

13. As mentioned above, the United Nations is also a service provider in its own right, running programmes in a wide range of areas, particularly development. It has formulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and assists countries in meeting them, along with other development goals, by offering support to governments in implementing the corresponding national development plans. Here again, parliaments are increasingly assuming a more assertive role to ensure that programmes are designed and implemented in a participative and transparent manner and that they meet the needs of the people. Action by parliament includes:

- ✓ Participating in the development of poverty reduction strategy programmes by, for example, holding public hearings, commissioning expert reports and submissions, questioning relevant ministers and officials, and formulating policy proposals;
- ✓ Adopting enabling legislation and budgets to implement these and related development programmes;
- ✓ Reviewing and, as the case may be, approving foreign aid programmes negotiated by the executive branch of government with the United Nations, including the

international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and with bilateral donors;

- ✓ Monitoring implementation of these programmes not merely for their financial soundness but especially for their effectiveness in delivering development to the people.

14. The United Nations system frequently implements programmes that touch directly on State policies. Every one of them should ideally be brought to the attention of parliament for possible review as part of its oversight of government policy.[3] The United Nations also constitutes a formidable knowledge base for countries everywhere. Parliaments have much to gain and can make a notable difference to the general welfare by acting on some of the research done by the United Nations.[4]

15. The United Nations system is funded by States largely through the national budget adopted by parliament. Just as parliament monitors the performance of national entities funded through the State budget, so, too, should it review the performance of the international organizations receiving funding. To this end, parliaments are showing increasing interest in:

- ✓ Undertaking some form of periodic review of the functioning of these organizations and of the policies pursued by the government in regard to them;
- ✓ Reviewing the broad policies that these organizations apply in regard, for example, to development cooperation.

Parliaments at home and abroad

16. It has been observed that the substance of politics is becoming ever more global but the process of politics is not. The fundamental political institutions - elections, political parties and parliaments - remain firmly rooted at the national and local levels.[5] This is only to be expected. The nation-State still forms the basis for the structure of international cooperation, and parliaments are national institutions that embody the sovereignty of those States.

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[3] To quote a few examples among many, the programmes of the World Health Organization touch on national health policies, the protection and assistance programmes of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees impinge directly on a country's human rights obligations and its population and migration policy, and UNICEF programmes are directly relevant to a country's child protection framework and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

[4] For example, a recent United Nations study demonstrates that violence against children occurs on a large scale and in a range of settings, that it is often under-reported, and that it can have a devastating impact on children. Parliaments can be instrumental in curbing violence against children by raising the United Nations study in parliament, measuring State policies and programmes against the study's findings, and enacting corrective measures where necessary.

[5] See the *Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on relations between the United Nations and civil society, including parliamentarians and the private sector* (Cardoso report, UN document A/58/817).

17. It is therefore logical that parliaments address international issues, including the work of the United Nations, on their home territory. By successfully working United Nations affairs into their agenda and proceedings, national parliaments can provide a parliamentary dimension to the work of the United Nations and thus help bridge the democracy gap in international relations.

18. This is not to say that parliaments are absent from the work of the United Nations. On the contrary, the parliamentary presence at the United Nations is becoming larger and more diverse, in ways that include:

- ✓ Missions by members of parliamentary committees and other parliamentary delegations to different offices of the United Nations system to exchange views on their work and on international conventions that are being or will be implemented;
- ✓ Parliamentary missions to examine United Nations field work, for example in peace-building operations;
- ✓ Parliamentary participation in official national delegations to the United Nations General Assembly and other major meetings of United Nations organs;
- ✓ Parliamentary support for several United Nations operations by, for example, engaging in parliamentary diplomacy, participating in election observer missions, and providing resource persons in governance projects;
- ✓ Participation in a growing number of hearings, panel discussions and conferences organized in conjunction with major United Nations meetings.

19. In these different endeavours, a conscious effort is also being made to mobilize the expertise that exists in parliamentary standing and select committees with a view to connecting with the different United Nations bodies dealing with the specific issues within their competence. In this way, parliaments are in a better position to interact with the United Nations not only by contributing substantively to discussions taking place at the United Nations, but also by ensuring that the questions are followed up in parliament itself.

20. In a nutshell, parliaments' interaction with the United Nations is founded on action in parliaments at the national level, complemented by greater and more systematic engagement by parliaments internationally. To drive this process forward, parliaments are committed to making better use of existing regional assemblies and their world organization rather than creating new international parliamentary structures or assemblies.[6]

The role of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

21. The IPU therefore has a central role to play in making this strategy work. It is the world organization of parliaments. It facilitates political dialogue between members of parliament and mobilizes parliamentary cooperation and action on a wide range of subjects that are

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[6] See for example the final declarations of the two World Conferences of Speakers of Parliament (UN documents A/55/409 and A/60/398) and the IPU statement to the 2005 High-level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (http://www.ipu.org/Un-e/sp-unga160905.pdf).

high on the international agenda.[7] The IPU provides an essential bridge between the national parliaments and the United Nations; it raises awareness in parliaments of the United Nations and its work, mobilizes parliamentary action on issues that are high on the international agenda and encourages and facilitates their interaction with relevant entities within the United Nations system.

22. More recently, the IPU has undertaken several reforms and adapted its policies, structures and working methods to the demands of the 21st century. This has included:

- ✓ Placing much greater emphasis on promoting closer cooperation between parliaments and the United Nations within the IPU's policy and programmes;
- ✓ Monitoring and contributing to the reform process at the United Nations and mobilizing parliaments to work with the newly created United Nations bodies;
- ✓ Mobilizing more generally the expertise that exists in parliaments on many of the major issues before the international community today and bringing it to bear on the deliberations taking place at the United Nations;
- ✓ Greatly expanding the number and content of parliamentary hearings, meetings and panels that it organizes every year in conjunction with the United Nations General Assembly and major United Nations meetings;
- ✓ Creating awareness in parliaments through training activities, seminars and global campaigns on major issues requiring urgent political action by parliaments and their members;
- ✓ Developing parliamentary handbooks and other practical tools to facilitate action in parliament to ratify, implement and monitor international conventions negotiated at the United Nations;
- ✓ Working closely with the United Nations and its programmes and agencies in designing and implementing joint programmes and activities, particularly to promote democracy and good governance from a broad perspective.

23. Notwithstanding these advances, the IPU's Member Parliaments are asking for a more substantive and equitable working relationship between the United Nations and their organization. They have set up the Committee on United Nations Affairs to monitor compliance with the series of recommendations developed in recent years for strengthened cooperation between the United Nations and parliaments, examine how they are fulfilled in practice, and make proposals for more effective implementation.

24. All of this is done by the IPU at the request of parliaments. In recent years, however, governments have also asked the IPU to foster more cooperation between the United

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[7] A more complete mission statement states that the IPU "*aims to ensure that parliaments and their members can freely, safely and effectively do the job they were elected to do: express the will of the people, adopt laws, and hold governments accountable for their actions. The IPU implements programmes to strengthen parliaments as democratic institutions. It audits parliaments, provides technical assistance and advice, undertakes research, and develops standards and guidelines. It places special emphasis on promoting and defending human rights and facilitating women's participation in politics*" (IPU, Handbook for Parliamentarians, No. 14, 2007).

Nations and parliaments.[8] They have granted the IPU special observer status at the United Nations General Assembly[9] and use their biennial review of cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU to make recommendations for strengthening interaction between the United Nations, the IPU and parliaments.[10] Evidence of this growing demand by the executive branch of government for a stronger relationship between the players is to be found in the latest General Assembly resolution, which focuses on five specific inter-related areas:

- ✓ Strengthening the IPU's contribution to the work of the United Nations General Assembly, including its revitalization, and to the new bodies such as the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission;
- ✓ Building an active role for the IPU in support of the Economic and Social Council, particularly in relation to its annual High-level Summit and the new Development Cooperation Forum;
- ✓ Increasing cooperation between the United Nations and the IPU in the realm of democracy and good governance, including through the partnership agreement concluded between the United Nations Democracy Fund and the IPU;
- ✓ Developing further the annual parliamentary hearing at the United Nations and other specialized parliamentary meetings in the context of major United Nations meetings as joint UN/IPU events;
- ✓ Ensuring closer involvement of the IPU in the elaboration of system-wide strategies for consideration by the United Nations system and its Chief Executives Board for Coordination, with a view to ensuring greater and more coherent support by parliaments for the work of the United Nations.

Conclusions

25. What is the value of the most democratic State institution when so many of the decisions that matter to the life of the country's citizens, including their security, are taken beyond national borders by international institutions that are not subject to democratic control or accountability? This gap between the national level, where democratic institutions like parliaments are located, and the global level where so many decisions are now taken, is a major source of what is termed the international "democracy deficit".

26. Parliaments can, and increasingly do, take action to tackle this problem. As this paper suggests, their action necessarily depends upon the parliamentary system prevailing in any given country and the powers conferred upon the parliamentary chambers under the constitution or basic law. In all countries, however, it entails the use of parliamentary structures, working methods, habits and agendas, and where necessary their adaptation and modernization, to allow each institution to address the work of the United Nations and its related institutions.

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[8] Millennium Declaration adopted by Heads of State and government on 8 September 2000. UN document A/RES/55/2.

[9] See United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/57/32.

[10] See the most recent report of the United Nations Secretary-General on the subject contained in A/61/256 and the corresponding United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/61/6.

27. Every parliament is sovereign in its approach to this work, in keeping with the myriad of parliamentary cultures in the world. Common to all, however, is an effort to integrate the business of the United Nations into the day-to-day legislative and oversight work of parliament. As these efforts grow in vigour and outreach, parliaments are reaching ever further into the workings of the United Nations and participating in ever more diverse ways in its activities.

28. The IPU is a critical component of this equation. It promotes action by parliaments, acting as a catalyst, facilitating interaction with the world of the United Nations and, more generally, helping to ensure that the views of the parliamentary community are heard at the United Nations. The stronger the link between parliaments and the IPU, the better the chance of attaining the critical mass required to have a lasting effect on the United Nations.

29. The present challenge is to develop a common strategy for ensuring, in the words of the latest United Nations General Assembly resolution, *"greater and more coherent support by parliaments to the work of the United Nations"*. The IPU looks to its Committee on United Nations Affairs to provide the essential elements for such a policy.

Annex IV

**3rd WORLD CONFERENCE OF SPEAKERS OF PARLIAMENT**

United Nations, Geneva, 19-21 July 2010

Item 3

SP-CONF-2010/3(b)-R.1
1 July 2010

# PRESENTATION OF REPORTS ON PROGRESS SINCE THE 2005 SPEAKERS' CONFERENCE

## (b) BUILDING GLOBAL STANDARDS FOR DEMOCRATIC PARLIAMENTS

*Rapporteur: Ms. Rose Mukantabana*
*Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda*

### Introduction

The 2000 and 2005 World Conference of Speakers of Parliament gave a strong endorsement of the IPU's work to promote democracy worldwide. They reaffirmed the central role played by parliament in furthering democracy nationally and internationally, stressing that parliament is the very embodiment of democracy and the central institution through which the will of the people is expressed, laws are passed and government is held to account. The Speakers pledged to consolidate the IPU as the primary vehicle for strengthening parliaments worldwide, and thus promoting democracy.

The IPU pursues a two-pronged approach to promoting democracy: it sets standards and it builds capacity in parliaments. This work is firmly grounded in the organization's Statutes, which assign a central role to the IPU in strengthening democracy through parliaments.

The past decade and a half have seen considerable developments in the IPU's democracy work, particularly in the area of setting standards. This report reviews progress the IPU has made in this field since the 2005 Speakers' Conference. It also identifies the next steps through which the IPU can take the process forward and retain its leading role in the development and promotion of democracy criteria and values.

### IPU's approach to standards-setting

Standards-setting often brings to mind a situation where a person or group of persons designs a set of rules/criteria whereby others can be "judged" with little or no input from the "judged". The process involves the establishment of indicators on the basis of which qualitative/value judgments are made, often by outsiders, using quantitative measurements. This process allows much scope for subjectivity and may not actually achieve much substantively. It may lead to the establishment of league tables that seem to

achieve no other purpose than to reward and therefore please the "good students" and annoy or sow resentment among those at the bottom of the table.

The IPU has adopted a different, and it is hoped, more productive approach, which is non-prescriptive. The approach is consultative, inclusive and participatory. Ownership of the process and buy-in from those being assessed are crucial to its success.

The IPU has involved parliaments in the development of standards, in the firm belief that democratic principles cannot be realized without appropriate political institutions and practices and that these institutions can only be judged to be democratic insofar as they embody or serve to realize these principles. Parliaments are continuously engaged in a dialogue that allows them, collectively, to identify what makes for an effective contribution to democracy, it being understood that they should embody democratic principles and values if they are to achieve this objective.

**Recent milestones in setting standards globally**

*Universal Declaration on Democracy (1997):*

A review of the IPU's standards-setting work should be seen against the background of the Universal Declaration on Democracy, which was adopted by the IPU in 1997. The Declaration was the first attempt by the international community to codify in a single document the founding principles and constituent elements of democracy at both the national and international levels.

The Declaration has been recognized as a yardstick against which democracy can be measured and provides the basis for the recent work carried out by the IPU in setting standards. The 2007 decision by the UN General Assembly to proclaim 15 September International Day of Democracy constitutes in part a commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration on Democracy.

The principles and values of democracy set out in the Declaration include the need to preserve and promote the dignity and fundamental rights of the individual, achieve social justice, foster economic and social development of the community, the imperative for all components of society, including men and women, to be able to participate fully in the management of the society, free political competition involving all in society as a modality for acceding to and wielding power, the rule of law, and the link between democracy and peace and economic, social and cultural development.

The Declaration therefore stresses the importance of free and fair elections as a means of enabling the people to express their will; the need for effective, honest and transparent government, freely chosen and accountable for its management of public affairs; and the existence of strong State institutions, including a parliament in which all components of society are represented and which has the requisite powers and means to express the will of the people by legislating and overseeing Government action.

The Declaration also stresses the international dimension of democracy. It affirms that the same principles that apply to democracy at the national level should also apply to the management of global issues at the international level. States are therefore urged to

ensure that their conduct is consonant with international law and that institutions and mechanisms put in place to steer global governance should be open, transparent and accountable.

*Parliament and democracy in the twenty-first century: A guide to good practice, (2006)*

The 2nd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament, held in September 2005, received a progress report on the work the IPU had initiated to develop standards. It also reviewed an initial draft of a guide on democracy. The IPU finalized and published that guide in 2006. This Guide builds on the Universal Declaration on Democracy. It identifies the values and objectives of a democratic parliament as follows: representativeness, transparency, accessibility, accountability and effectiveness at the national, international and local level. It identifies the institutional mechanisms for achieving these values and is replete with examples of how these values and objectives are put into practice by parliaments across the world.

Pursuant to the principles on which the IPU's standards-setting activities are predicated, the Guide does not seek to rank parliaments or to undertake an assessment of the quality of democracy in their country. Rather, it reflects general agreement by the parliamentary community on the constituent characteristics of a democratic parliament, the values underpinning it and the institutional means and modalities for implementing them. The Guide is both an exposition of theory and a compilation of good practices being implemented by parliaments to make them better able to carry out their constitutional mandate: law-making, oversight and representation.

The Guide clearly places parliaments at the forefront of the democracy agenda. Contrary to the widely held opinion that parliaments are not living up to expectations, the Guide shows, with concrete examples, exactly what parliaments worldwide are doing to remain accountable to their electorate. It is clear from the Guide that a healthy debate is taking place at the international level on what it takes to be a democratic parliament. What emerges is that the challenges facing parliaments in the 21st century are similar and that a sense of emulation among parliaments is taking root in a bid to meet those challenges.

*Evaluating parliament: A self-assessment toolkit for parliaments, (2008)*

These changes have led several parliaments to review their performance and working methods and introduce improvements. To facilitate their task, the IPU produced a self-assessment toolkit in 2006. It is intended to assist parliaments and their members in assessing their performance against generally accepted criteria for democratic parliaments and to identify priorities and methods for strengthening Parliament. Given that the toolkit is based on universally recognized democratic values and principles, it is relevant to all parliaments, whatever political system they adhere to, and irrespective of their stage of development.

Once again, the purpose is not to rank parliaments or to pass external judgment on a given parliament. The process of self-assessment is conducted by parliamentarians themselves, who are the principal actors and judges. The self-assessment toolkit provides a framework which consists of a series of questions that invite value judgments. The

questions are a starting point for a dialogue on what is working well and what needs improvement. The framework is divided into six sections:

- The representativeness of Parliament
- Parliamentary oversight of the Executive
- Parliament's legislative capacity
- The transparency and accessibility of Parliament
- The accountability of Parliament
- Parliament's involvement in international policy

While parliaments are at liberty to administer the toolkit themselves, some of them may prefer to draw on external assistance for a variety of reasons, including lack of capacity or know how. The IPU has therefore established and trained a core group of facilitators, who can be called on to assist parliaments in administering the toolkit. This toolkit has been used by parliaments in developed and developing countries, for example as part of a strategic planning exercise or as a framework for a periodic review of parliament's activities. In 2009, the toolkit was used by the parliaments of Australia, Cambodia, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa. In Rwanda and Sierra Leone, the IPU facilitated the process with experts. The parliaments of Bahrain and Ireland have recently reported that they were using the toolkit to evaluate their performance.

The toolkit is based on the precept that democratization is not a one-off event, but an ongoing process that requires continuous introspection by democratic institutions and the introduction of corrective measures where necessary.

The IPU strives to foster the necessary linkage between standards-setting and building the capacities of parliaments, both of which are mutually reinforcing. The toolkit has been used to help parliaments develop or amend the strategic plan for their future development. The findings of assessments can be fed into the training, advisory and other services the IPU provides to beneficiary parliaments.

*Other standards-setting initiatives:*

A number of other institutions are involved in developing standards and benchmarks as well as methods for assessing parliamentary performance as follows:

- The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) developed in 2006 *Benchmarks for Democratic Legislatures*. The CPA Benchmarks are phrased as statements rather than as questions. There are 87 benchmarks divided into four main headings: General, Organization of the Legislature, Functions of the Legislature, and Values of the Legislature.

- The United Nations Development Programme has supported the creation of regional versions of the CPA benchmarks. This has led to the adoption of a set of criteria for democratic legislatures by the Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Parliamentary Forum is also working on a regional version for southern African parliaments.

- The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has developed a *Survey on the Gaps between Parliamentary Power and Practice*. The NDI survey tool is

not an evaluation per se, but a method of collecting perspectives from parliamentarians, parliamentary staff and civil society organizations on perceived parliamentary powers and perceptions on the use of these powers in practice. The NDI survey tool covers 25 issues that often are included in benchmarks for democratic parliaments or in parliamentary self-assessment tools.

- The Association of Secretaries General of Parliament (ASGP) has decided to prepare a version of the IPU self-assessment toolkit specifically for parliamentary administrations. A conference organized by the IPU and the ASGP on 22 October 2009 brought together parliamentarians, Secretaries General, specialized parliamentary staff and parliamentary organizations under the theme of *Evaluating parliament*.

The IPU has remained very active within the community that has demonstrated a strong interest in developing methods for evaluating parliamentary performance. It has been able to secure widespread acceptance of the concept of self-assessment as an effective means of helping parliaments improve their performance.

**Next steps**

The IPU's standards-setting work has been welcomed far and wide. In fact, many parliaments have asked IPU to do more to develop and/or refine tools to measure progress in parliaments towards achieving the basic precepts of democracy.

Parliaments continue to face questions of legitimacy and need to forge ever closer ties with their constituents. These are among the major challenges that parliaments have to contend with in the 21st century.

The 3rd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament will discuss, inter alia, ways in which parliaments can help secure global democratic accountability for the common good in a world in crisis. Achieving this objective requires parliaments and their members to set the example by striving to be more accountable to their electorate in words and, above all, in action.

The IPU needs to continue to show leadership in the field of standards-setting and to help parliaments make an increasingly robust contribution to democracy. The 3rd World Conference of Speakers of Parliament recognizes this and its draft outcome document invites the IPU to strengthen its activities in support of democracy.

The Conference Preparatory Committee endorsed the idea that the IPU now needs to move this process forward by establishing a voluntary review mechanism of parliamentary performance. The mechanism would offer parliaments an opportunity to exercise collective responsibility and assist each other in assessing and improving their respective performance. As parliaments seek to perform their law-making, oversight and representational duties in a more efficient fashion, the sharing of experiences and good practices resulting from such a mechanism would be helpful to all parliaments.

Like similar mechanisms which have been established at the United Nations and regional organizations, the IPU exercise would be based on agreed values, codes and

criteria. The review process would be consultative, participatory and transparent, as well as grounded in dialogue and interaction between key stakeholders. It would be firmly in the hands of the parliaments themselves and would be free of political interference. Participation in the process would be entirely voluntary and the process in each case would be nationally owned.

There is currently no global mechanism that allows parliaments to monitor their performance collectively and engage in experience-sharing and emulation on the basis of criteria identified by themselves collectively.

**Conclusion**

Addressing the issue of legitimacy of parliaments and seeking greater accountability in the national and global systems of governance require parliaments to continue to play a leading role in the promotion of democracy. They need to show leadership and commitment to the designing of standards which they apply to themselves. Only then would they stand in better stead to require more accountability of governance at both the national and global levels. Only then would they be able to provide a solid foundation for democracy.